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HOW TO MASTER YOUR MEMORY



INTRODUCTION: WHAT WAS THIS BOOK ABOUT AGAIN?

We've all been there.

You're done shopping at the mall or are walking out from the cinema, and you're completely lost in the parking lot. Is the car to the left or right of the entrance? Three rows over, or four? Was this even the door you came in?

Or you're ready to leave the house and suddenly there's a frantic search on for your keys. You could swear you put them on the counter last night when you came in because you immediately went for a glass of juice ... or was that even yesterday when you did that? Wasn't that more like three days ago?

And who hasn't suffered the embarrassment of standing in front of someone that you've just met, or even someone that you've known for years, and suddenly their name is gone from your mind. Mark ... no, Phil ... no, Tom ... no ... It doesn't seem to matter how long you've known the person or even how close you are to them, as it sometimes happens even to parents – they go through the whole list of their kids' names, and the names of a few kids from the neighborhood, before they land on the name of the child standing in front of them.

What is it about our memory that makes it so unreliable like this? It seems like such a strange part of our human psyche, unlike any other. When it's time for our bodies to eat, without fail our stomach will growl. When our body needs liquid, our mouth gets dry. When we need to chew our food, our mouth just naturally goes up and down. There's no confusion with these systems, no lack of reliability when it comes to their function!

What is also so very bizarre about the human memory is that, while we might have a problem remembering where we parked just a few hours ago, chances are we can remember the lyrics to our favorite

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song from our childhood, sometimes even to the point of annoyance. How often have you said, or have heard someone else say, "There's this song in my head and I can't get it out!" Many things that we'd like to forget – that embarrassing time in grade school when we slipped and fell on our face in front of everyone, that time when our bodies made a strange noise during a business meeting, or even something terrible and traumatizing that we saw or heard – seem to be burned into our memories forever, no matter how hard we try to erase them.

It is strange too that some things we do "by memory," without even really thinking about it, as if our memory is a separate function that just takes over our actions without any thought on our part. Someone who loves to bake can often forego looking at their recipe card for that favorite batch of cookies, as their hands just seem to know what to add, how much, and when. Who really gives a lot of conscious thought to their driving when they're behind the wheel? Somehow we just seem to wind up at the office or supermarket or back at home, seemingly without even realizing how we got there.

But memory is such an odd thing, how it seems to check in and out on a whim. Many people often report feelings of "déjà vu," where they are certain that they've been to a particular spot before, or have met this particular person before, even though they know consciously that they haven't. In these cases, it seems as if their own memories are now playing cruel tricks on them!

The question now arises, is there anything you can do about this? Is memory loss just a natural part of aging, as many people believe? Are you powerless to stop it? Should you resort to just carrying a small notebook for yourself, and name badges for everyone else?

Or is your memory like a muscle – if you exercise it, will it get stronger? What about tips and techniques to help you remember things that are only needed temporarily, such as where you parked your car or what you've been told to bring for that potluck supper? Do any of these work?

Happily, the answers to these questions are no, you do not need to just accept memory loss as a fact of life and you are not powerless against it. Yes, you can exercise it to make it stronger, and there are

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techniques you can use to help remember things temporarily, short of carrying a notebook or stacks of Post-Its with you everywhere, and to help you store information in your long-term memory as well. You can learn how to easily memorize those unfamiliar faces and the names that go along with them, you can commit grocery lists to memory without worry, and you won't cringe the next time your spouse asks you to recall what he or she said the last time you were out to dinner together.

And that's where this book comes into play. We're going to outline these tips and techniques in an easy to follow way, and give you some ways that you can improve your memory for the short-term, long-term, and everything in between. They won't work like the magic tricks you might see at a Las Vegas show, but they will be easy enough for anyone to learn and master.

To get a better understanding of how you can improve your memory, it would probably be helpful to spend a few moments discussing how the human memory works in the first place. After all, the most successful dieters are those that understand what metabolism is before they try to improve theirs; a good auto mechanic understands how an engine works before he or she tries to work on one, and so on. So, those that want to be truly successful in improving their memory do well to find out a little bit about how it works in the first place.

HOW THE HUMAN MEMORY WORKS.

Let's start off by pointing out that the human brain is probably one of the most complex bits of machinery in our universe. Whether you believe in evolution or creation or anything in between, you are probably going to agree with that statement. Our brains process billions of bits of information every second and have built-in automated responses to that information – your nose itches, and your hand immediately reaches for it without any seemingly conscious thought on your part. You don't need to remind yourself to eat or sleep, as the brain will send out signals when it's time to take care of those necessary functions as well.

Despite the fact that the brain has been around for as long as humans have, there is still much we don't know about it. For example, the

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concept of “déjà vu” still remains a mystery to scientists, who cannot explain it in detail – does it happen because your current situation simply reminds you of something from your past, because your memory is too weak to remember what it is that seems so familiar, or because you’ve been abducted by aliens who’ve erased parts of your memory? That last theory isn’t as popular as the first two of course.

But scientists and biologists have been able to do some brain mapping when it comes to memory and how it’s stored in the mind. Unlike physical objects, the brain’s memory is not a filing cabinet that holds so many “documents,” but rather memory is a series of nerve pathways and connections that are either successfully made (enabling you to remember where you parked), or not (which is when your memory fails).

When we take in information through our senses – we see, hear, taste, touch, or smell something – that information flows along neural paths into our brain, which then processes and acts on that information accordingly. The first time someone tastes coffee, their brain registers everything about it – the smell, the temperature, the taste – and then decides if it enjoys the sensation or not.

Remembering something is simply a process of re-firing or restarting those neural paths or connections. When you smell coffee brewing, those same neural paths get sparked, immediately bringing to memory the taste of coffee, and your decision as to whether or not you liked it. That memory then triggers the next step – either you get yourself a cup, or you wrinkle your nose and keep walking.

The brain recognizes the difference between information we need only temporarily (such as “carry” numbers when doing arithmetic, or what we just walked into the kitchen to get) and stores that in a part of the brain that holds short-term memory. This information stays there for about half a minute, and holds only about six or seven pieces of memory at one time.

Long-term memory storage, however, appears to be unlimited. Virtually everything that you say or do on a daily basis is because of your long-term memory. Showering, tying your shoes, driving, carrying on conversation, even reading this book is all done because you learned how to do those things, you learned their necessity and

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function (showering is necessary for good hygiene, tied shoes are necessary so that you don't trip and so that they stay on your feet), and that information is stored in the long-term memory area of the brain.

Persons who have suffered brain injuries in the area where long-term memories are stored can be unable to do even the simplest of daily tasks, including walking or talking. They can be at a loss as to language and even their own family's identities. Because those neural pathways cannot be fired or connected again, that memory is lost to them.

So while memories are not physical things stored in our brains, they can be affected by physical defects or injuries.

IMPROVING MEMORY.

For years it was believed that your memory was just what it was; either you had a good one or a bad one, and of course it always got worse with age. Some people even thought that memory was like a physical storage area, and that the reason it got worse with age is because you were learning and therefore needing to store too many things. You needed to purge old memories to make way for new information.

But as scientists learned more about the brain and how memory actually worked, they realized that there were things once could actually do to improve not only their short-term memory, but to help recall facts that were stored in their long-term memory as well.

These tips can be as easy as paying closer attention to details, such as when meeting persons for the first time. Nervousness or distraction may mean that you're not really listening when a name is said, making it harder for you to recall it moments later.

It's believed that it takes about 8 seconds of attention for a memory to travel from short-term to long-term storage, so quickly glossing over information you're hearing for the first time will only hinder your ability to recall it later.

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“Over-learning” is another common technique for strengthening memory. This is what a person does when they repeat a bit of information over and over again – they are over-learning it so that there is more of a chance that it will be stored in long-term memory.

Other techniques can be somewhat complicated – until you learn them, that is. Like knitting, driving, or the rules of American football, once you learn the “whys and hows,” you never really need to think much about them after that. Memory techniques become just like memories themselves – once they’re burned into your brain, they become a natural process.

So armed with all this information and what should be some confidence that you can indeed improve your memory, the only question that remains is, Are you ready? Good! Let’s get started.

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REMEMBERING SIMPLE LISTS

Who hasn't gotten home from the supermarket and realized that they forgot one or two very important items? It is particularly embarrassing when we realize we forgot the one item that sent us there in the first place!

This has probably happened to everyone, and it usually doesn't matter if we're there to get an entire pantry's worth of groceries or just a handful of items – chances are, we're going to forget something.

Making a list is of course the easiest way to overcome this, but what happens when you're already out running errands and remember those few things you need? Pen and paper just aren't handy, and you already have in mind the items you need. It should be easy to remember those few items in the little bit of time it takes you to arrive and walk through the supermarket ... right?

Unfortunately for many, the answer is a very quick "No!"

So how to improve your memory for that short list, whether it be groceries or things to mention to your spouse this evening or things you need to put into your briefcase before heading to work?

Two easy techniques are the link method and the story method.

THE LINK METHOD.

The link method is probably one of the easiest and simplest ways to remember these short lists. The link method involves linking each item on the list with a certain visual or auditory clue that starts with the same letter, sounds the same, or in some other way will provide a clue as to the item on your list.

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For example, suppose your list of needed items from the supermarket is:

milk
butter
eggs
bread

You may link each of these to the sentence "Men bet everything big." Now you have the initials – m, b, e, b – to help you remember. If you try to walk out of the store without milk, you know that you didn't get your "m" or "men" item.

In the above example, you may run into complications when you have two items with the same first letter, as in the case of bread and butter. What to do then?

It may be helpful to tailor your sentence to reflect this. For example, your sentence may be "Michelle bugs everybody's brother." By having the first two letters the same as the first two of your items (bugs = butter, brother = bread), you know what they stand for, and won't leave the store with bleach and baskets rather than bread and butter.

Linking works also for visual clues, meaning that you attach a mental image to each item or to the list itself. For the example above, you might imagine a farmer milking a cow with one hand while buttering bread with the other, with an egg cracked over his head. It's a silly image, but one that you won't easily forget. Each part of the image – the cow, the bread and butter, the egg – is a reminder of what you're in the store to purchase.

THE STORY METHOD.

When using the story method, instead of a simple sentence you would instead construct a small paragraph in story form, the main characters or happenings in some way relating to the items on your list.

For example, using our list above, your story might be:

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"Michelle [milk] went to her broker [bread] after she eloped [eggs] but was busted [butter]."

Picture a girl named Michelle sitting in her broker's office with a new wedding ring, getting the bad news of her financial bust. This brings the story to life for you.

Again, you can use words that have the same two letters of list items that begin with the same letter, and try to make the story as unusual as possible. This way you won't confuse it with real memories or stories.

It also helps to use people you know to better help you visualize. For example, if you know someone named Michelle, you can picture her doing exactly what the story entails (avoiding anything that Michelle might find offensive, of course!). This helps to keep the story fresh and vivid in your mind.

PRACTICE!

Practice these techniques now, when you're not pressured to actually remember something. Let's pretend that you need to put certain things into your briefcase before you leave the office. They are:

budget
spreadsheet
disk
calendar

What sentence might you come up with to link these words? How about, "Bunnies spread disease coldly"? Try one for yourself, and then walk away for a few minutes. When you come back, did you remember those four items?

What story might you construct to remember? How about, "A diamond [disk] was several carats [calendar] big, so the sparrow [spreadsheet] that tried to move it couldn't bdge [budget]."

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Practice with your own stories as you make up lists of various items – ingredients in your favorite recipe, names of your spouse’s cousins, and so on. Once you start doing this over and over, you may find that you really enjoy getting creative with your links and stories to help you remember!

These techniques are fine if your list can be remembered in any order, such as those groceries or cousins, but what about ordered lists; those things that need to be remembered exactly as they appear? If you need to remember the names of streets to turn on to get to your friend’s house, of course you’ll need to remember those in order.

There are additional tips and techniques to memorize these as well; let’s discuss them next.

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REMEMBERING ORDERED LISTS

Trying to remember a short grocery list or items to pack in a bag is probably the easiest memory problem there is. Chances are, it doesn't matter if you grab the milk off the shelf before you get the butter and eggs, or if you put your socks into your suitcase before shirts.

Ordered lists can be a bit more tricky. Obviously when heading off someplace new, you need to remember the directions in a particular order. When trying to recall a recipe, you probably need to add certain ingredients before others.

How to go about doing this?

THE PEG SYSTEM.

An ordered list can be thought of as numbered steps – the first street you need to turn on is number one, the second street or landmark to look for is number two, and so on. The same with any ordered list – the first ingredient needed for that recipe is number one, the second step or ingredient is number two, etc.

The peg system is a method of visualizing wherein you number all of your steps or items from one to ten, and then visually link them to an item that rhymes with that number.

Here is a common breakdown of those numbers and their rhyming words:

One = Bun

Two = Shoe

Three = Tree

Four = Door

Five = Hive

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Six = Bricks

Seven = Heaven

Eight = Gate

Nine = Line

Ten = Hen

So, let's use the illustration of driving directions. Pretend they are as follows:

"Take Hayes Road north to Hall Road and turn right. You'll pass Romeo Road, the next street is Canal; turn right. After about two miles, you'll see Metro Parkway; turn right again. At Turner Street, turn right again. Our house is the third on the left; it's blue with a white picket fence."

So, your first step, number one, is Hayes Road. Using the word that rhymes with one, bun, imagine a hamburger bun that you can barely see because it's covered in a haze (Hayes).

Step two, or shoe, is Hall Road. So imagine the haze has cleared and now you see a shoe walking down a hall (Hall).

Three, or tree, is Romeo. Obviously you could picture that shoe leading to Romeo standing under a tree, waiting for Juliet. Four, or door, is Canal, so imagine a door opening to a rushing canal.

And you would continue from there. So, try that yourself with the rest of the directions. What would you imagine for the rest of the streets, the home, the address?

Your pictures do not need to be elaborate or very descriptive, as if you're writing a book. All that's needed are simple phrases to remember the steps in order, for example, "A bun in a haze. A shoe going down a hall. Romeo standing under a tree."

By remembering each of these and using the words that rhyme with the number of the step (bun for one, shoe for two), you can then recall not only the items on your list, but their proper order as well.

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If the words used above are uncomfortable for you, take a few minutes to make up your own, being sure that they rhyme with the numbers. For example, you could use sun for one, blue for two, and so on.

OTHER NUMBERED ITEMS.

You can also substitute other numbered items that you know for these rhyming words, and use these in your visualization.

For example, suppose those driving directions only include Hayes, Hall, and Romeo roads. If you have three children, you could picture them in order – your firstborn, Alex, in a haze, your second child, Lee, walking down a hall, and your third, Katie, standing with Romeo.

Someone with a larger family can use this for longer lists – your cousins or grandchildren in birth order, for example. You just need to be careful of confusing which one was born first – be sure that whatever group you use, you're very sure of their order so as not to confuse the order of your list to be memorized!

Instead of using numbers, you can also use the letters of the alphabet. Imagine fruit or another simple item for each letter – apple for a, banana for b, cherries for c, dog for d, elephant for e, and so on.

Then, when visualizing your list, simply use the corresponding image for each successive letter. For those street directions, picture an apple in a haze, a banana in the middle of the hall, Romeo picking a cherry, and so on. Now your list is not numbered, it's in alphabetical order – apple, banana, cherry.

PRACTICE!

The key to learning any of these memory techniques is to practice them until you're comfortable. So, do that now. Write out your list of rhyming words, or birth order of your cousins, or images that begin with successive letters of the alphabet.

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Now use that information to memorize the following list in order:

put gas in the car
stop at the bank; deposit a check
stop at the office supply for paper clips
mail the bills

How did you do? Did you picture a sticky bun (bun = one) for your gas cap? Pulling your check out of your shoe (shoe = two)? A chain of paper clips around a tree (tree = three)? And walking through the door of the post office (door = four)?

Whatever method you decide to use for ordered lists, again, the key is to practice it until it's almost a habit. Get that corresponding visual – your kids, letters of the alphabet – in your mind, and don't deviate from using it.

With some work and more practice, you'll be memorizing lists in any order with ease.

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FOR LONGER LISTS

Okay, so you've learned how to memorize that quick grocery list of a few items; chances are, you'll never forget the butter again.

But what about lists that are a bit longer than just those few items, or few streets to turn at?

THE STORY METHOD.

The way our brains are constructed, we're more likely to remember odd or unusual events, sights, sounds, and the like, than we are to remember the things we see or come across every day.

Think for a minute how this is true for you. You remember that embarrassing time in school when you tripped and fell – or saw someone else trip and fall – because it was an unusual event. Chances are, you can't remember the everyday lesson plan for any of your classes, but you remember that one day you aced that big test or the teacher praised you in front of everyone – because it was an unusual event.

Things that are odd or funny are also more likely to be remembered. You probably see people on bicycles every day of your life and can't recall any of them even an hour after they're gone, but you can remember that man on a unicycle you saw at the circus or beachfront. Pedestrians come and go in front of you and chances are you don't even remember what they looked like, but someone in a bear suit walking down the street ... that you would probably remember for a lifetime!

With this thought in mind, we turn our attention to the story method that's often used for remembering mid-length or even longer lists. But what is the story method, and how does it tie in with our thoughts about funny or unusual events being remembered more often?

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Let's examine these here:

What is the story method?

Simply put, the story method is when you incorporate the items you're trying to remember into a story in your mind. This isn't something you're going to be writing out for a book or your diary or anything else, just something you'll picture for your own use.

For example, suppose your grocery list is this:

celery
whole chicken
cucumbers
lettuce
hamburger buns
salad dressing
apples
tomatoes
cheese
hamburger patties
butter

That's quite a list! But don't worry, you can remember it.

The first thing you might do for a list like this is organize it a bit. For example, you know that in your supermarket, the fruits and vegetables are in front, then you'll walk by the meat section, then the bakery, then bottled goods, then dairy.

So, you'll move the list around accordingly, putting the items in order of how they're laid out in the store:

celery
cucumbers
lettuce
tomatoes

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apples
whole chicken
hamburger patties
hamburger buns
salad dressing
butter
cheese

If you make a point to memorize it in the order of how the items are laid out in the store, you won't run the risk of having to walk back and forth between departments.

Now you'll apply the story method to memorizing. But before you begin, let's think again to what we said about things that are odd and unusual being remembered more easily.

Make it silly!

Composing a story of a woman who walks into a supermarket and buys produce isn't going to help you remember anything. A woman walking into a supermarket happens every day, and chances are, you'll forget this story as quickly and easily as you forgot what you were wearing the last time you went grocery shopping.

Making your story full of odd and unusual characters and circumstances is the real key to being able to remember it clearly. You don't want to get yourself bogged down in too many descriptive details, but compose it something like this:

A man is walking down the street, smoking a stalk of celery like a cigarette.

If you saw a man walking down the street puffing on a stalk of celery, you'd notice that, right? Chances are you wouldn't be able to take your eyes off of him. If the police came and asked you what he was smoking, there would be no doubt in your mind: "It was celery, officer! I'm telling you, he was smoking celery ..."

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Making your story unusual is a key to making it memorable.

So let's continue with this to see how it would be used for that entire list.

A man is walking down the street, smoking a stalk of celery like a cigarette. He is waiting for a bus, and pulls out a knife and a cucumber, starting to whittle away on the cucumber like it's a piece of wood. As you look at him closely, you realize he doesn't have hair, but what's on his head is a bunch of leafy lettuce. Another pedestrian on the street doesn't like his smoking or his whittling and starts throwing tomatoes at him, like the old-time theatre critics. You want to get away from the commotion, so you hop on the bus, but the driver is your favorite teacher from grade school, repeating what you always heard your first day: "A is for apple. A is for apple. A is for apple."

You want to stay on the bus, but you're too chicken. As you head to get off, you notice your teacher is gone, and now it's the real bus driver's, and you see her name tag: Patty.

On the street, waiting for a cab, someone whistles at you and shouts, "Hey, nice buns!" You turn around and realize it wasn't you they were whistling at but the young woman at the bus stop next to you, who's wearing a wedding dress.

You want to walk over to the woman to ask why she's in a wedding dress, but suddenly you slip on the pavement. You look down and realize you just walked through a big pat of melted butter.

Another man standing there with a camera goes to take a picture of you, sitting there on your backside in butter, and as he does, he says mockingly, "Say cheese!"

Wow, that was quite a story, wasn't it?

Quick, without looking back at it, what was the man smoking? Why did he pull out a knife? What was the woman at the bus stop wearing? What did you slip in?

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Chances are these images are burned into your brain because they are so odd and unusual (well, hopefully they are!). By picturing a woman at a bus stop in a wedding dress, you'll be able to remember *dressing*. By thinking of someone whistling and yelling "Nice buns!" you can remember those *hamburger buns*.

Again, stories should be odd and unusual, and full of colorful and vivid pictures, but not a lot of unnecessary detail. You don't need to worry about what the woman in the wedding dress looked like or how big the bus was or whether or not it was sunny. Keep the main parts of the story focused on the items you need to remember.

PRACTICE!

Okay, time to practice what you've just learned. Here's a list of things you need to remember to bring to your family's beach outing this weekend:

- towels
- sun block
- folding chairs
- camera
- the beach ball
- beach umbrella
- mystery novel you're reading
- the cooler
- bag of dry clothes you've packed

First, organize.

Remember, organizing your list if at all possible or necessary is the first step. This will keep you from duplicating your efforts.

How might you organize the list above? It could be in the order of how the car needs to be packed – chairs, umbrella, cooler, bag of

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clothes, towels, beach ball – and then a separate part for what you'll keep with you – camera, sun block, novel, bag of clothes.

Make the story unusual and creative.

Using the organized list above, how might you begin your story with chairs and an umbrella? How would the cooler then fit in? Clothes are next.

Practice coming up with a story that is, again, creative but not too detailed, and check yourself against the list above. How did you do? Did you get bogged down in details or did you miss an item?

Keep plugging away at it and making up your own lists of items, and you're sure to become a master storyteller – and memorizer as well!

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REMEMBERING GROUPED INFORMATION

Being able to memorize a list is a good thing, but what happens when you need to memorize more than one, or groups of items?

For example, suppose you want to remember the states of the U.S. that are commonly referred to as “New England states,” comprised of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

You could simply use the Peg System to remember each list individually, coming up with a simple sentence to assign each word, however, there is another technique that many recommend for these types of lists.

THE ROMAN ROOM TECHNIQUE

Imagine a room in your house that you know well, be it your living room, kitchen, bedroom, or office. Imagine all the different objects in that room – furniture, decorations, linens, appliances, lamps and other lighting, and so on.

When using the Roman Room technique, you associate an object, person, or word with something in each of your rooms so that when you need to recall that word you simply remember its association.

For example, you’ll use your living room for the New England states. What is the main piece of furniture you sit on? That is now associated with Maine. What is the newest item in the living room (you don’t need to be technically accurate, just choose something newer than most). This will be associated with New Hampshire.

Now imagine the baseboards running along the floor of this room. You want to keep them sealed so that no vermin will get in, so the baseboards are now associated with Vermont.

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What is the largest item in the living room? The television or TV cabinet? Whatever has the largest mass will be associated with Massachusetts.

Do you have a small table or other object that sits by itself in the room? Picture this small item as an island, and it will be associated with Rhode Island.

The hallway that leads to the next room connects the two together, so it will represent Connecticut.

And there you have it. Now go back and think about the items in your living room. You're picturing your favorite chair ... why? It's your main place to sit. The hallway represents what? The baseboards are sealed because ... ?

By using a room that you know very well and doing this simple association technique, you can quickly and easily remember these groups of information.

PRACTICE!

Let's practice this technique by using Ivy League colleges, namely, Brown, Columbia, Yale, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton.

Choose another room in your house that you know very well. How about the kitchen?

The easiest college to remember might be Brown. What in your kitchen is brown? How about coffee? The coffeemaker now represents Brown.

Columbia might be a bit harder. But do you have blinds on your kitchen window, or a door to another room? Are the blinds or the doorjamb in a straight line – like a column? Anything in your kitchen that goes up and down like a column will represent Columbia.

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Look at your sink's faucet. If the water came out too hot and burned you, wouldn't you yell? So the hot water faucet represents Yale.

Cornell may be a bit easier as well. Do you have corn cob holders? Or a can of corn in the cupboard?

How about Dartmouth? There are probably a lot of round things in your kitchen, such as a dinner plate or large platter. A large round object looks a lot like a dartboard, so that will represent Dartmouth.

Butter kept in the refrigerator is hard to spread, and something that's hard can represent Harvard.

The pens or pencils you keep by the phone represent University of Pennsylvania.

And as for Princeton, you might think of a chair that's in your kitchen or nearby, such as a high chair for the baby, or the one you sit in while eating. Your chair is like your throne ... fit for a prince.

THEY DON'T NEED TO BE EXACT.

By now you've probably realized that the Roman Room technique doesn't use exact words or phrases from the lists you're trying to remember, and this is a key point.

If you're trying to use the exact word, you're probably going to get hung up. After all, who has something in their house with the word "Harvard" on it, unless you went there and bought a sweatshirt?

The point is that you want to remember something that will remind you of the word or item you're trying to remember. The word hard can bring to mind Harvard; the word yell can remind you of Yale, and so on.

This is also something to remember for virtually all of the memory techniques we've discussed so far. That woman in the wedding dress

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at the bus stop from the last section should remind you of salad dressing, and of course you can substitute anything that works for you. Imagine a man trying to tame a horse (on a ranch) if you're shopping for Ranch dressing, or imagine the woman at the bus stop was eating pasta – for your Italian dressing.

Of course, this won't work for when you're trying to remember numbers, which need to be exact. Getting a phone number "close" isn't going to help you, so how do you remember numbers, especially when they're very long?

Let's look at that topic now.

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REMEMBERING NUMBERS

Committing a few numbers to memory probably isn't a very difficult task. Usually just repeating something over and over again – a house address, a check amount, etc. – is enough to remember it for as long as it's needed.

However, there may be times when this just doesn't work or when the "number of numbers" you need to memorize is far too long.

So what then? Must you always rely on pen and paper?

For some things, this may be best, but typically you can use some memory techniques to commit those numbers to memory.

THE JOURNEY METHOD

Think of all the different "journeys" you go on each and every day. It might be a simple routine of getting from bed and out the front door in the morning – from the bed to the shower, to the sink, to the closet, to the kitchen, to the front door – to the "journey" you take to get to work, to the supermarket, to your parents house, and so on.

Remembering landmarks or touchstones that you encounter along each journey can be a great method of remembering long strings of numbers. A touchstone or landmark gets an assignment of a number or a part of it, and then when you recall these in order, you have your complete number.

This may seem difficult at first, but there are some things to remember to help you:

Take the segments out of the longer numbers in a way that works for you.

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We often break up numbers automatically without even realizing it. For example, think of a telephone number, such as 555-4567. Trying to remember it as 5554567 might be nearly impossible, but most will usually break it into segments when repeating it: 555, 4-5, 6-7.

However, if you try to do this with a long number that you need to remember, it might not work for you. It limits how it is that you're going to remember it. So, you might take out the segmented parts and just reinsert them once you've called the number to mind.

For example, suppose your boss asked about last year's exact sales number for your department. The figure is \$14,536,672.

Let's look at that number without breaks: 14536672.

Now let's choose a journey; how about that morning routine?

To start out, we're getting out of bed. How many beds do you sleep in? Chances are, it's 1.

When you sit up, you put your feet in your slippers. Between your feet and your slippers, how many objects are there? Four.

You turn on the water to the shower – how many fingers did you use? With one hand, that would be 5.

In the shower, you wash your hair. The instructions on the shampoo bottle say to "lather, rinse, repeat." How many steps is that to wash your hair the way it says? Three.

When you get out of the shower, you hear the radio blaring the morning traffic report. Traffic reminds you of that old song, "Get Your Kicks, on Route 66."

Next, you get dressed. How many days of the week do you get dressed? Seven (hopefully).

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The last number is two, which should be very easy to assign. How many creams do you put in your coffee? Between you and your spouse, you need to make coffee for how many? Or, how many children do you need to get ready and out the door? Pick any of these to assign the number 2.

By thinking about each number in order according to your “journey,” you know you’ll get them right. You don’t use two fingers to turn on the shower, you don’t sleep in four beds.

Once you call the number to mind, you can then break it back up into the appropriate segments – add the decimal place, put in the commas, etc.

Obviously this type of technique takes some rehearsal, but it can be done. And of course you want to use a journey that’s comfortable and familiar to you, and one that you can break down in this fashion. For example, suppose you use the journey of getting to work in the morning, and the number you want to memorize has an 88 in it – and your favorite radio station’s dial is 88. So that’s an obvious choice.

Don’t limit yourself to realism!

Like many of our other techniques, this method is usually a combination between real items – the number of beds you sleep in – and ones that you make up to help you remember. As we said with the Story Method, sometimes the things that are odd and unusual will be remembered more easily.

For example, when remembering the number four, picture you and your spouse both reaching for the alarm clock at once, so that there’s a “mishmash” of hands slapping the snooze – how many hands between the both of you? Four.

PRACTICE!

So it’s time to put it into practice. You just heard a news story about a woman who found a bag stuffed full of money and who promptly turned it in to authorities without hesitation. You want to tell that

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story to a coworker and you really want to emphasize how much money she found - \$65,143.32.

Step one: Forget the breaks.

As we said, you can add the commas and decimal point later when you have the entire number memorized.

For now, think of the number as a whole: 6514332.

Pick your journey.

What are you going to use – your morning routine, your commute, the drive to your parent's house?

The first number or two numbers might help, for example, if your father is 65, then of course you're going to your parent's house!

Or suppose you take the #6 bus to get to work, or set your alarm for 6:00 a.m., then of course it's your morning commute.

If nothing simple comes to mind, what can you think of that's creative? What about you, your spouse, your two kids, the dog and the bird all crammed into your bedroom when you wake up? Picture the dog chasing the bird around the room while the kids destroyed your pillows using them for a pillow fight – you don't know if the feathers all over the room are from the pillows or the bird!

But the bottom line is, there are six creatures in the bedroom, causing all the chaos.

The important thing to remember when using the Journey Method is to choose a journey that you are familiar and comfortable with, and that doesn't change.

If your morning routine is never the same two days in a row, then you might need to choose something else more concrete – the drive to the supermarket or your friend's house, for example.

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But by practicing and being creative, soon enough you'll have even the longest strings of numbers memorized!

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USING CONCEPT MAPS TO REMEMBER STRUCTURED INFORMATION

What exactly is a “concept map?” According to Wikipedia, “Concept mapping is a technique for visualizing the relationships among different concepts. A concept map is a diagram showing the relationships among concepts. Concepts are connected with labeled arrows, in a downward-branching hierarchical structure. The relationship between concepts is articulated in linking phrases, e.g., ‘gives rise to’, ‘results in’, ‘is required by,’ or ‘contributes to’.”

This is a somewhat wordy definition, but simply put, a concept map is something like a flow chart. It shows the relationship between ideas or specific items and lays them out in a simple diagram that explains their relationship.

STRUCTURED INFORMATION.

As we’ve said, some information needs to be remembered in a particular order. You may need to remember to pick up the children before you run other errands, or else they’ll be stranded at school. You may need to transfer money into your checking account before you pay certain bills so you’re not overdrawn, and so on.

But structured information is a bit different than ordered information. Again using the concept of a flow chart, you may not need to remember the names of the Accounting department **before** you remember the Human Resources department, but you do need to remember which department has need for more staff.

Uses for concept maps.

Many storytellers use concept maps to outline their stories well before they even begin writing, or will refer to the concept map as the story unfolds to make sure they’re not conflicting with any information

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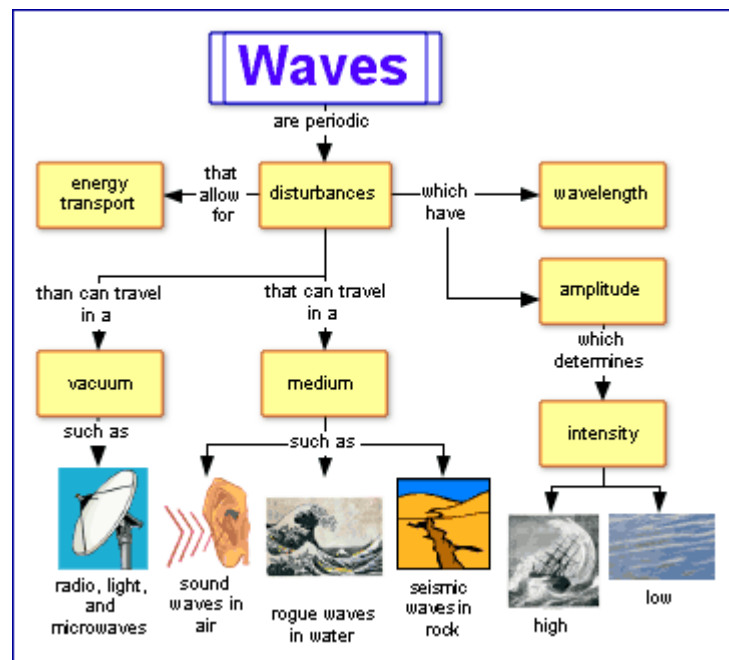
revealed earlier or with their plans for where the story is headed. This too keeps all the characters and their relationships clear to everyone working on the story, such as writers on television shows or for movies.

Concept maps can also be used to remember all the persons in a large, extended family. This may seem somewhat heartless, assuming that a person would need help to remember their own family, but when you're talking about dozens of cousins and in-laws and nieces and nephews, and when all the extended members live far away so that they don't associate regularly, it's easy to forget that Dave is married to your second cousin Beth who is Theresa's daughter by her first marriage and the younger sister of Brian ... and so on. This is why many people use a so-called "family tree" to keep adding to their lineage, which is a type of concept map.

Larger and more complicated concept maps are used to remember and understand scientific principles and how they relate to other ideas and facts.

Concept maps are great tools for those that are considered visual learners, meaning ones that have an easier time learning and remembering ideas that they can picture rather than simply repeat.

By writing out or drawing an overall concept and everything else that follows, a visual learner can stand back and use this as a picture to get that necessary overall illustration in their mind.



So how might concept maps be used for you to remember structured information?

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DO SOME SKETCHING.

It's going to be difficult to remember the structured information you're trying to learn and the entire concept map itself, so help yourself out a bit by actually taking notes and sketching out the information you're trying to learn.

For example, suppose you want to finally do that family tree to help with your large family. How would you go about doing that?

There are two ways you can begin. The first is to start with the known relatives that are the oldest – not necessarily the oldest that are still alive, but the oldest that you know of. This might be your great grandparents, or any other ancestor. You can then work your way down, filling in the children, then the children's children, and so on.

Or, you can begin with those that you know of, making small groups for different branches of the family tree, and then continuing to organize it "up the line" as more names get filled in. So, you might start with your aunt Chloe and her husband John, and list the cousins you have from them. Then move on to grandma Aubrey and her brother Alexander.

LABEL YOUR INFORMATION.

Once you have your information as fleshed out as you can, in order to organize it, you can assign colors or numbers or some other label that will help you keep everyone in the appropriate place. For example, suppose you start with your grandparents on your mother's side. They had three children, your mother and your two uncles, John and Sylvester.

You might assign John the color red and Sylvester the color blue. Your mother gets the color brown.

John had two children, Steve and Alicia. Imagine them in red potato sacks for clothes, Steve's with a black belt, Alicia's with a pink belt.

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Alicia's children, Sarah and Michael, are also in potato sacks, both with pink belts.

Now do the same for each member of the family from the other children. Imagine them wearing something outrageous that's the color you've assigned – Sylvester is in a blue sheet, his children in matching pillowcases.

Once you have these images in your mind, it becomes easier to remember who belongs with whom. When you see your cousins or nieces and nephews, you imagine them in the colorful outfits you pictured – and hence, the part of the family they belong to.

Your labels need not be colors but can be anything that helps you group the information. For example, suppose uncle John is very patriotic, so you picture him holding up an American flag and his children dressed in red, white, and blue stripes. Or maybe he's a vegetarian, so everyone on his side of the family gets a vegetable as an assignment. You picture his children eating celery and cucumbers, so you know they belong to John. The point is to use labels that are easy for you to picture and that will help remind you of that particular segment of information.

PRACTICE!

So let's practice with a simple flow chart. You're going to need to remember the employees of three departments from your office. Those departments are Human Resources, Accounting, and Sales.

The HR manager is Sue Smith. Her secretary is Phyllis Stevens, and the other members of her department are named Mike, George, Alice, and Sharon.

The Accounting manager is Alayna Murdoch. Her secretary is Hannah Jones. The other members of the department are named Johnny, Edward, and Joe.

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The Sales manager is Bob Lang. His secretary is Barbara Smith. Other members of that department are named Lee, Phil, and Elaine.

Do some sketching.

It helps to take out a small piece of paper and quickly jot down those names in flow chart format.

Keep them separate, whether it's on separate sheets of paper or just in separate groups.

Label the groups.

What labels will you choose for each group? Maybe different forms of money for accounting, store mannequins for Human Resources (mannequins = artificial humans), and boats for sales (sailboats = sales).

Visualize these in your mind. Bob Lang, Sales Manager, is on a big boat wrestling with the sails. Lee, Phil, and Elaine are walking around with life vests on. Do you see this all clearly?

Do the same for the other groups as well. Picture Hannah Jones, secretary for accounting, walking down the hall with pennies falling out of her pockets. Or Sue Smith, HR Manager, dragging a mannequin into a meeting with her.

By organizing these groups and then labeling them in a quick and easy to follow way, you'll soon find that whatever your need to keep structured information orderly, you'll never have a problem remembering it.

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MEMORY GAMES

Scientists are finding out that your memory is much like a muscle – the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets. And the opposite can often be true when it comes to any part of our brain that requires logic and problem-solving ability – if you don't use it, you can become very unskilled when you need it.

But at the same time, who wants to do memory exercises that seem just like that – exercise? Most people want to come home after a hard day at work and shut off their brains, not switch them into overdrive.

Which is where memory games can come into play. When you make learning fun, children look forward to school. When you make memory exercises fun, you'll look forward to doing them as well.

So here's a few favorite memory games you can play to help yourself along.

STORY TELLING GAME.

This game is best done with a group. Set out 20 or so unrelated items on a table. Each person in the group needs to tell part of a story that incorporates three of the items successively.

If the first three objects are an apple, a key and a mobile phone, here's how the story might start:

Person 1: In the orchard, ripe apples were falling from the trees.

Person 2: But the gate to the orchard was locked and John had brought the wrong key.

Person 3: So he called Sue from his mobile phone to see if she could help.

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Once all the objects have been included in the story, remove them all from the room. See who can remember the most items. Now tell the story again as a group, taking it in turns. The group will probably be able to remember the whole story and so recall all the items.

ASSEMBLING A JIGSAW – BLIND.

If you enjoy jigsaw puzzles, this can be a very fun game. Assembling one “blind” means not being able to keep the picture on the box in front of you.

So, with the pieces on the table in front of you, give yourself a minute to look over the picture on the box. Try to commit it to memory, then put it away and assemble the puzzle.

The more you do this with different puzzles, the better you’ll become as you’ll soon find yourself being able to commit more and more details to memory.

CONCENTRATION.

Many different versions of the game “Concentration” have been around for years; for some time it was even a televised game show.

For yourself, simply get a deck of cards and take a pair of every card. Mix them up and set them out, face down, on a table in front of you.

Flip over one card, then another. Once you have two face up, if they don’t match, they need to be turned back down.

The object of course is to try to get as many pairs matched up as quickly as possible. Challenging your self to remember where that matching card was that you saw just a moment ago can be fun, especially if you start timing the games. Work to beat your time with each game, and see how you do.

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You can even play this game with a friend, each of you taking turns to flip over a card, trying to find its mate. When you get a pair, you keep those two and get another turn. The person with the most pairs when you've gone through all the cards wins.

There are many electronic memory games that you can purchase or play online. You can type "memory games" into your web browser or visit the same website where you play other games, but take some time to challenge yourself. Don't settle for games or television or anything else that will do nothing to improve your ability to concentrate and notice detail.

As we said, your memory can get stronger if you exercise it, but the opposite is true as well – as they say, "Use it or lose it!"

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HOW TO LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

It seems strange that for most adults, learning a foreign language is one of the most difficult things they will ever do – and yet babies do it all the time!

Why is it that babies have a much easier time learning a language than adults, who can reason on the words and phrases being taught and consciously associate it with objects, items, or ideas?

Biologists have a few theories that have to do with mind mapping and new connections being formed without previous connections interfering, but these explanations are not going to help you learn a language now, as an adult, since there's not much you can do about the information your brain has already learned.

THE LINK METHOD.

For some, using a linking method of visualizing an odd or unusual item that brings the word or phrase to mind can be useful. Consider these examples, taken from Mind Tools:¹

English: rug/carpet - French: tapis - imagine an ornate oriental carpet with a tap as the central design woven in chrome thread

English: grumpy - French: grognon - a grumpy man groaning with irritation

English: to tease - French: taquiner - a woman teasing her husband as she takes in the washing.

¹ From www.MindTools.com

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The point of this lesson is that you need something from the English word linked to a visual that will recall the word in the foreign language.

As always, the more unusual or colorful your image, the easier it will be to recall.

IMMERSING YOURSELF IN THE LANGUAGE.

As we've mentioned, it takes at least 8 seconds of concentrated thought for a bit of information to go from short-term memory to long-term. Additionally, the repetition of information, or "over-learning," also helps to keep that information in your memory for good.

To apply this information to learning a foreign language, you see how it does no good to simply listen and repeat phrases from a tape or an instructor. That quick repetition does not give your mind long enough to put that information in your permanent memory storage, and does not allow you to dwell on it long enough either.

What are some ways to improve upon these methods then?

Spend more time with the language.

Perhaps one of the reasons that babies have a much easier time learning a language is because they are surrounded by it constantly. Their family, television, radio, everyone that's around them is constantly speaking this language. It may be easier for them to associate words and phrases with their corresponding ideas if they're always seeing a bottle when hearing the word, always getting kissed when hearing "I love you," and so on.

So when it comes to learning a language as an adult, try to emulate this atmosphere as much as possible. Hearing a flat audio tape or sitting in a classroom will not immerse you in the language.

Instead, see if there are television cable channels you can subscribe to in the foreign language. Visit museums, rent movies, and do whatever else you can to surround yourself in the language. And play those

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audio tapes even when you're not really listening to them, to pick up on the language's cadence and rhythm.

Learn every day.

There's probably not a day in the life of a baby that doesn't include language. Even when their family is not particularly paying attention to them, they still hear the words being said around them.

For you, make sure you do something every day to learn the language. Keep that cable station on in the background, or as we said, play the tape even when you're not listening to it. It's surprising how much the mind can pick up even when it's not focused, so don't think you need to limit your auditory clues to when you're ready to sit down and really pay attention.

Focus on phrases, not just words.

Think about the English language, and how words do not simply stand alone but are connected together into commonly used phrases. For example, you don't simply ask, "Bathroom?" Instead, you would say, "May I use your bathroom?" or "Where is the bathroom?"

Foreign languages are much the same. Their words do not function by themselves either. So concentrate on phrases and how the words are connected, and even how they can change depending on the way they're being used. Take the initiative to add these phrases to your learning rather than simply learning words.

Put the language to use in real life.

Suppose you're trying to learn Chinese. Without being insulting or mocking anyone, try a few phrases the next time you're in a Chinese restaurant. Tell the waiter or counterperson that you're learning and ask if you said it correctly. Someone who is from the country of the language you're learning can probably teach you much more than another student or someone who learned it from a book, so be sure to use that resource of someone who is native.

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Remember to relax and make it fun.

What's the point of learning if it can't be fun? Even if you need to learn this language for business or another practical purpose, do what you can to make it enjoyable.

The mind is much more likely to adapt and relate to an activity that it enjoys rather than one that seems like a chore. So do what you can to learn appreciation for this language and make your lesson plans an enjoyable part of your day.

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HOW TO REMEMBER INFORMATION FOR EXAMS

Exams can be one of the most stressful times in any person's life. It seems that so much hinges on a good grade or being successful on the tests. Terrifying thoughts can run through any student's mind – What if I forget that important answer? What if my mind goes blank? What if I fail completely? What will people think of me? What will my friends say? What will my parents say? What will I do for a living if I can't get my degree (or license, or certificate, or something else just as important)?

However, exams needn't be as stressful as many students make them out to be. There are some simple techniques one can use to improve your memory and prepare yourself for even the worse of professors or tests.

YOUR PHYSICAL REACTION.

The body responds to a physical demand better when it's well-rested and not distracted by things such as hunger, thirst, or being tired. Your mind is the same way. When you're tired, angry, irritated, nervous, apprehensive, panic-stricken, or feeling any other negative emotion, you just simply cannot concentrate as well as you could otherwise.

It's often advised that when preparing for a big test or exam, you should forego the late night "cram" session for a good night's sleep.

You also need to take care of yourself physically the day or days of the exam or test. Make sure you have a good breakfast. If the test will be held in an unfamiliar location, be sure you have proper directions so that you're not rushed and frantic.

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These may seem like rudimentary bits of advice, but the bottom line is that your brain is still a part of your physical body, and not giving it the rest and nutrition it needs will only cause it to falter, much like an athlete that refuses to eat or sleep the night before a big game. All the memory tricks in the world won't work if you're falling asleep at your desk or so distracted by hunger that you can't think! So don't dismiss this advice quickly.

CLEARING YOUR HEAD.

It's an understood fact that the human mind just cannot concentrate on many different things at once. The idea of "multitasking" has fallen to the wayside for many as people are learning that the brain simply cannot handle more than one or two thoughts or events at the same time.

Think of when you're on the phone and there's a television and radio blaring behind you, your spouse calling your name, and kids tugging at your leg. How long does it take to get irritated?

Trying to work while distracted is an impossibility, especially when you're already feeling some anxiety on its own. So, put those thoughts out of your mind. Don't think about what this test means for your future or how much pressure your parents are putting on you or anything else. All of those concerns can be thought about and dealt with later; now is the time to concentrate on your test and your test alone.

LEARN AND APPLY THE MATERIAL.

Sometimes you do need to memorize simple facts and figures for an exam. Atomic weights, laws, names, dates, all of these things really cannot be typically applied to everyday life.

However, most of the material that someone needs to learn for an exam can be applied or illustrated using everyday items or circumstances.

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For example, suppose you need to learn a history lesson regarding Columbus' voyage to America. You may need to learn the year he sailed, the name of his ships, where he landed and so on, but chances are you'll be asked questions about why he sailed, the length of his voyage, the morale of the people he discovered, and so on.

When in class, ask yourself if you understand these things – the why, how, where, and other larger concepts of a lesson. Become involved with it emotionally – how would you have felt to be a crew member aboard any of his ships? Or if you were a Native that greeted him when he finally landed? Would you have been as brave as Columbus to even begin?

By making the lessons a part of yourself and really feeling them, rather than repeating them endlessly, you'll be more likely to be able to recall those facts when questioned.

USE MEMORIZATION TECHNIQUES.

But suppose you've done all of that – gotten your rest, put your troubles out of your mind, did all the imagining possible – and are still having some anxiety over all the things you need to remember. What then?

By using many of the techniques you've already learned so far, you can apply these to test time.

Over-learning.

Repeating something over and over again is a way that many students attempt to learn the cold hard facts that they'll need for an upcoming exam. Walk by virtually any dorm room of any university in the world and you'll hear faint chants from within, "1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. The atomic weight of cadmium is 112.411, the atomic weight of cadmium is 112.411."

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This type of repetition can work under certain circumstances, but there is a trick to actually make it work – you need to repeat these things often, but not constantly.

What does this mean? It means that you can repeat these facts several times in one sitting, but then it's important to walk away for a few hours or even a few days and then go back to your material and repeat it some more.

By giving your mind that gap in between you're going to reinforce that connection or pathway that you've created to put that memory in long-term storage.

The next time you want to remember something like this, try that method. Repeat it several times, then give yourself an extended break, then go back. You'll see that it becomes much easier to remember for a longer period of time.

The link method.

Linking your information to a visual clue is a good way to remember may facts and figures.

For example, suppose that you need to remember that Columbus received the financial backing for his trip abroad from Spanish Queen Isabella. To remember her name, you might picture Columbus scooping money out of a large bell.

Remember, the link method works if your visual clues are unusual and even silly, so let your imagination go a bit wild.

The journey method.

Sometimes exams and test require you to remember the order of occurrence of certain events. For example, in the decade of the 1960's, there were several prominent assassinations in the United States:

Medgar Evers (June 12, 1963)

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President John F. Kennedy (November 22, 1963)

Malcom X (February 21, 1965)

Martin Luther King (April 4, 1968)

Robert F. Kennedy (June 6, 1968)

An American History class might ask you to put them in correct order, without showing the dates as we've so conveniently done, of course! How will you remember them in the correct order?

Using the journey method may be a convenient way of doing this. Think of your morning routine, and connect these names to a stop along the way.

Imagine waking up to your doctor standing over you. This first stop is Medgar (med = medicine = doctor).

Your next stop is the bathroom, or as it's commonly called, the john. (John F. Kennedy; no disrespect intended to the late president.)

Continue to go through your morning journey for each of the names, and again, you don't need to be literal. Make up a visual or silly image in your head that you can connect with. Martin Luther King can be your spouse sitting at the kitchen table wearing a crown like a king, Robert Kennedy can be someone stealing your wallet from you the minute you walk out the door (rob = Robert).

REALLY LEARN THE MATERIAL.

This is probably the most important memory technique of all; really learning the material from top to bottom. And learning something means more than just sitting in a classroom trying to remember dry facts and figures.

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Think of it this way – someone who is a really good cook knows more than just recipes on a piece of paper. They're experienced in the kitchen and have a real "hands on" approach to their craft.

So do the same with whatever subject you're learning. If it's art, visit a museum or read books about it. If it's history, watch documentaries on television or again, visit museums. When learning science, again, there are shows on television that deal with different theories and thoughts – even children's shows can go a long way toward explaining how things work and illustrating these concepts in ways that can really help you remember them for when you're tested!

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HOW TO REMEMBER PEOPLE'S NAMES

"Eek. This company party is so important to me, I really want to impress the boss and everyone else. I'm dressed nicely, I'm witty, I'm doing such a great job.

But wait – I just met this person, they just said their name not two minutes ago. What was it? Robert, Robin, Rob, Ronald, Ronnie ... Did it even begin with an R?

And this other person – I've worked with him for years. I sit three cubicles over from him. I hear him introduce himself all the time. What is his name again? Pete, Phil, Paul, ... something with a P, I'm pretty sure. Perry? Patsy? Pencil? Okay, now I'm being silly ...

What is wrong with me?"

Chances are, the answer to that last question is absolutely nothing. There's nothing really wrong with you, you're not slipping into early dementia, you're not being rude or inconsiderate. Believe it or not, forgetting people's names is one of the most common problems you can have with memory.

But why is this, since someone's name is so personal, and usually something used every day? Or worse yet, why can't you remember the name you just heard moments ago?

And of course, the real question is, what can you do to improve this?

WHY WE FORGET.

There's a few reasons why we forget names, and understanding those reasons is a good first step toward correcting the problem.

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The first reason has to do with what we've covered before – that it takes at least 8 seconds of thought about any bit of information before it moves from short-term to long-term memory. And chances are, when you meet someone for the first time, there are many facts that your mind is trying to assimilate all at once, making it easy for their name to be lost in the shuffle.

For example, ask yourself if this isn't a typical-sounding introduction you would get to another person at a party:

"Mary, I'd like you to meet Phil. This is my husband's good friend, the one I told you about before, that works as a physical therapist for the Lakers. He got us those great seats that time last year when we went to the game, remember I told you about it? That was a blast. Anyway, I wanted you to meet so you could put a face to the name when I tell you about him."

Look back at all the information you just got about this person. He's a good friend of your friend's husband. He's a physical therapist. He works for a major sports team. He can sometimes get tickets to the games.

And when your friend starts talking about that game she went to that you discussed with her before, you're open to an entirely new field of distraction, remembering all the details she told you about the game. When she mentions that to you, your brain is suddenly flooded with images of that conversation.

Which probably also happens with all the other information you get as well – as soon as you hear that he's a good friend of the husband's you start to picture the two of them together. When you hear "physical therapist," chances are you picture him at work. All of those visual images also compete for attention from your brain.

With all of that crowding your consciousness, is it any wonder that you lose the person's name in there? Certainly you can't concentrate on it for the length of time it takes to move it from short-term to long-term memory if you're busy concentrating on everything else as well.

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It's also true that sometimes we forget people's names because we just don't use them as often as needed to keep that memory pathway strong.

For example, how often are you with your friends as opposed to the man who sits three cubicles over? Your friends' names you use constantly, but that man's name you may say or think about only a few times every year. That pathway that you create when you say a name is like a muscle you never use – it gets weak so that it sometimes doesn't work well when called upon.

The last reason that we often forget a name immediately is that we're very self-involved at the time. This isn't meant as a necessarily bad thing, as if we don't really care about their name, but chances are we're so busy worrying about the impression we're making or what we're going to say next that we're not concentrating on the information we're hearing.

HOW TO OVERCOME THIS.

So recognizing these facts, what can you do to overcome the problem? There are a few tips which we'll outline here.

Repeat.

When you're introduced to someone for the first time and their name is said, immediately repeat it out loud: "Phil. It's nice to meet you, Phil."

By saying the name out loud, you're not only using repetition but you're also giving your brain those added few seconds needed to move the information from short-term to long-term memory.

It also helps to say their name a few times during your first few minutes of conversation with them. "So, Phil, how did you get into physical therapy?" Or, "Tell me, Phil, do you have a lot of people bothering you to get them tickets to a Lakers' game?"

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Of course you don't want to overdo it and use their name in every sentence lest you sound like you're making fun of them, or are some kind of mindless parrot. Be particular and respectful of how you use their name, but do concentrate on it as you say it. Remember, it's for the benefit of your repetition that you're saying it, so be sure you're focused on it.

Link.

When you hear a person's name, immediately link it to a visual image.

The easiest and probably most effective is if you know someone of the same name. Picture the two people talking to each other, or better yet, mention it to that person when you repeat their name: "Phil. One of my favorite uncles is named Phil."

You can also use famous people as well. Think of famous people whose names you know without question – Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes, Victoria Beckham, Brad Pitt, and so on. Plant a picture of that person's face on the face of the person you're meeting with the same name, and it will be much easier to remember Tom, Katie, Victoria, and so on.

Or, try a visual image that will help recall their name. For Kate, picture someone skating. For Mark, imagine a big red checkmark. For Matt, picture a doormat.

Of course you want to keep your visuals simple so that they'll be easy to recall, and make sure that the visuals involve the person somehow. Imagine Matt wiping his feet on that doormat, or that big red checkmark right across Mark's face.

Set yourself aside.

It's actually a sign of politeness that you're very nervous about your first impression or about how you're going to carry on your end of the conversation. Being concerned with how people view you can be a good thing, especially when the people you're meeting are important to you – coworkers, potential in-laws, and so on.

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But this can also be a drawback, especially when trying to remember their name. You're so busy thinking about the next thing that you're going to say that you give little thought or concentration to what they're saying.

Yes, conversation is a two-way street, and you don't want to stand silent as the other person tries to get you to talk, but you don't want to make the mistake of worrying only about yourself and your interests, your points, and so on. Set yourself and your own thoughts aside for a few minutes and concentrate on the person you're meeting. Ask them questions to draw them out, and really listen to the answer. How did they get into their line of work? What do they like about it? How long have they worked for the company?

When you take a personal interest in someone else, you can actually allay your own nervousness. People will see you as approachable and hospitable and will actually be drawn to conversations with you, which should give you the reassurance you need to put your nervousness to rest.

Practice these techniques here and soon enough you'll be able to breeze through any conversation or meeting with ease, and will never forget another name.

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MEMORY HOOKS

A memory hook is a trick or memory technique that is much like a link, with one exception – the memory hook is typically meant to be funny or silly, or in some way nonsensical. Memory hooks might include songs, puns, or odd phrases that are associated with another image.

Or, a memory hook is simply a phrase that is used so often in one context that you cannot help but to associate the two.

Whether you know it or not, you're probably very familiar with many forms of memory hooks, as they are often used in the world of advertising, television, and movies.

For example, think of an actor that uses a phrase in several of his or her movies. When you hear the phrase, "I'll be back," don't you think of Arnold Schwarzenegger? Comedic actor Ben Stiller is known for often using the phrase, "Nobody makes me bleed my own blood! Nobody!" in many of his movies. Quick – who used the phrase, "What up doc?" Of course it was Bugs Bunny.

When you hear one of these phrases, you may immediately think of a favorite scene from one of these examples – that's a memory hook.

Advertisers use memory hooks all the time when they compose jingles or strong visual images. For example, can you remember the phrase, "Have it your way?" Or, "You deserve a break today?" You probably immediately begin picturing hamburgers, as those are former slogans of Burger King and McDonald's.

Memory hooks can also be puns, for instance, one travel agency's slogan was, "Ninety percent of accidents happen at home – so travel!" By giving you a humorous way of looking at travel, they created a memory hook, and you may very well think of that every time you hear a statistic about accidents at home.

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USES OF MEMORY HOOKS.

As we've said, memory hooks are often used in advertising, or any place where you need to get people's attention in a non-threatening and approachable way, and have them thinking about and remembering what you've just said.

Memory hooks do not necessarily need to be words. Imagine a cartoon figure and its advertised product – a comical camel is Joe Camel for Camel cigarettes; singing grapes are for California raisins, and so on.

Even churches are using memory hooks, with signs that read, "Looking for a sign that you should get back to church? Here it is!" And, "CH CH. What's missing? UR!"

HOW TO USE THEM.

So let's suppose you're in advertising or have a business and need to do some advertising. How can you use memory hooks to your advantage? What's their secret?

Short and sweet.

Which phrase is easier to read and understand, and would catch your eye on an ashtray:

"Please extinguish your cigarettes and dispose of them in this receptacle."

Or:

"Park your butts here."

Too many words and people will simply gloss over your entire message. Any good marketing course will teach you that if you try to emphasize everything, you wind up emphasizing nothing. After all,

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don't you often skip over the "fine print" of anything because it's just too much to read?

The point of a memory hook is not to tell a story or give detailed instructions – it's to quickly catch someone's eye. You want them to remember how cute and clever something was, not stand and read your entire list of instructions.

Use humor.

People like to laugh, and anything that they find funny and amusing is more likely going to be remembered, simply because it was enjoyable.

We're also drawn to humorous people and sayings because they seem more non-threatening and confrontational. For example, think of the signs mentioned above for a church. Which would you rather attend, one that has a humorous approach to your attendance such as those, or one that has a big sign out front that says, "Come here or burn for eternity!" Chances are, the ones that are more lighthearted will seem more empathetic and approachable.

Humor in advertising slogans is usually in the form of puns, as this is a form of linking – using the phrase "Eye'll be seeing you!" for an eye doctor links the sentence to what he or she is selling – care for your eyes. Using a common phrase such as "Don't flush your money down the drain" for a plumbing service is another example – flush and drain are of course associated with plumbing.

If you're working on a marketing slogan now, make a list of words that somehow tie in with your store or your services. For example, if you're a chiropractor, consider the words straight and adjust or adjustment. If you're a florist, think about the words flowering, bloom or blooming.

Write out as many of these words as you can and then think about how they can be used in a sentence with that "twist" of a pun to link a person's memory to you.

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Keep it positive.

Effective advertising often uses positive concepts to encourage someone to purchase their product or service, rather than the negative concept of criticizing the competition.

When working on an advertising slogan or marketing campaign for whatever reason, make sure that what you're concentrating on is a positive message about your product, not a negative one about your competitor. Not only will a negative image fail to create that memory link in your prospective client's mind, it may also offend them and turn them off to your business! So be careful about concentrating on what you have to offer, not on how bad your competition is.

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HOW TO CONSTRUCT MEMORY MAPS

Memory or mind maps are a very useful tool for not only remembering information, but for organizing it as well.

WHAT IS A MIND MAP?

A mind map is much like a flow chart or other diagram that puts several different aspects of one topic in an easy to follow graph, or map.

For example, think about that family tree we discussed in an earlier section. By writing out the “branches” or segments of it, do you not get a clearer picture of how each person is related to the next? Great Aunt Ida is your grandmother’s sister, which makes Alice your mother’s cousin ... and so on.

Mind maps do not need to be linear, as with a family tree. They can begin with one central idea in the middle with branches that flow from there.

For example, think of your own life. You are the middle concept of this mind map. One “river” might include your immediate family – spouse, children, siblings, parents. The other “river” may be your career, which would encompass your office, your boss, your education, your responsibilities, and so on. What are other important aspects of your life? Is it your religion, your volunteer activity, your friends, your hobbies? By using a mind map to illustrate these things, you might begin to think of how one aspect of your life needs to be reworked or reordered so as to pay better attention to another – or you might see where something is missing, such as friends or rewarding activities after work and family.

These maps are becoming a new and effective way of note taking during lectures and classes, or for considering business concepts and

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ideas. By looking at ideas overall, you can get a better idea of what's there and what's missing.

HOW TO CONSTRUCT MIND MAPS.

To create a mind map, choose the main topic or idea which will be the central notion of the map. It can be represented by a key word or an image. All the basic ideas should be placed on the branches connected to the main topic. Other important facts and details can be added to the branches, so that the mind map expands in a radiant fashion.

Creating a mind map is a kind of brainstorming exercise. When working on a mind map, let your ideas flow freely, without much consideration about the structure and hierarchy. This allows you to capture all the details related to the topic. You can always reorganize the map items to form a specific hierarchy later.²

HOW MIND MAPS HELP WITH MEMORY.

It's important to note that memory has much to do with learning, and specifically, with learning how one concept relates to another. This is part of creating those pathways that help you recall things when necessary, and in creating links.

True understanding and application is also important to memory. Being told when to apply your brakes when driving is not enough; you need to understand that sometimes you need to slow or stop your car, and that's what the brakes do. Once you understand the concept of brakes = car slows or stops, then you can better remember when to use those brakes, without consult a manual or driving instructor.

Mind maps help by giving you a better understanding of how different aspects of one idea or concept all relate to another.

Additionally, having information organizes also makes it easier to remember. Remember the illustration we used in the first section

² From www.mind-pad.com

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about the grocery list – organizing the needed items by their appropriate section can help you to group the information and so better recall it.

In other words, the human memory is something of a large mind map itself. When you see that man across the street waving at you, you immediately connect him to the your mother and remember that it's your uncle Phil. Because Phil's place in your "map" makes him not a threat or a stranger, you know to wave back.

Realizing this, you can better understand how to use a mind map to improve your memory. Trying to remember cold facts and figures is going to be much more difficult if you cannot attach those facts and figures to the concept you're learning overall. For example, your American history class may ask about significant assassinations during the 1960's. If you really understand who Medgar Evers, Malcom X, and Martin Luther King were as men, their beliefs, their political views, their activities, and can relate that to the time period of the 60's when racial tension was at a peak, then you can better remember these men as being assassination victims. You've mapped racial tension and put these men in the correct branch of those that were assassinated.

By using this same concept, you can better remember many other significant events of the 60's as well. For example, suppose the question is about what sparked the riots in Detroit in 1967? If you have an understanding of the racial tensions of the 1960's and have mapped it out with the above-mentioned assassinations and other incidents, you can better remember the facts leading up to and including those incidents in the city of Detroit. This is going to be much more effective than simply learning a rote answer of, "The arrest of several African-American persons from a downtown club by police." Why would this arrest cause a riot? Who was involved in the riot, and what were their reasons?

If you've mapped the 1960's properly, you can put the Detroit riot in perspective of the time period and realize why a so-called routine raid would cause such an aftermath.

And the converse is true also – if you don't truly understand all the events and circumstances that led up to this incident, you really won't understand the answer that you're trying to recall. You really haven't

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learned that answer in the first place, and if you haven't learned it, you'll have a much more difficult time remembering it.

USE MIND AND MEMORY MAPS OFTEN.

The good thing about mind maps is that they are not completely structured and restrictive. When an interesting point about a subject or bit of information enters your mind, you can find a place for it on the mind map and work it into the overall picture. This will get you more involved in the material and so make that memory pathway easier to recreate.

Again, your entire memory is something of a mind map overall, with your life being in the middle of it. Everything and everyone that you encounter fits somewhere on that mind map, and is related to something else you've learned in the past – you learn early on that you need money to buy things to live, and you need to work to get money, so you remember every day why it is you're going to work. Being with a certain someone makes you happy so you create a mind map of memories with that person by pursuing more time with them, leading to marriage and family.

Do the same when learning any new topic. Put the core idea or subject in the middle of your mind map and branch out from there. How does each concept relate to the core idea? How do they relate to each other?

You can also ask yourself how one "branch" or "river" of the mind map leads to another. How does one event or circumstance set off a chain reaction that leads to another main event or circumstance? By tracing these things on the mind map, you realize how the two events are related, even though they may be far apart.

For example, someone may say that America has its roots in the ancient Roman Empire. Someone unfamiliar with history may wonder how that is. A mind map of the Roman Empire may show how Britannia, now Britain, was once a territory partially occupied by the Roman Empire. Eventually the city of Rome sent soldiers to encamp there permanently to guard over their territory. Because they stayed there permanently, their families, shopkeepers, and other parts of the

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Roman empire followed and stayed permanently as well. Eventually this part of Rome broke off and merged with the part of Brittania that was not under Roman rule, forming their own rulership.

And of course America was once a territory or colony of Britain, occupied by European settlers until they broke away and formed their own union.

By mapping events this way, with the Roman Empire in the middle, you can better understand the concept of America having its roots in Rome. Once you understand it, you will be better able to remember it.

Practice using mind maps often for new concepts, giving yourself some freedom of expression, and soon you'll find that you not only enjoy taking notes this way, but that these will be an invaluable aid to really learning and remembering everything.

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SECRETS OF BUILDING A SUPER MEMORY

It seems that some people just have a really good memory while other people can't recall a name they just heard moments ago. Is it all just genetics and mental abilities?

The answer is no. Chances are that the person who has a great memory is already applying many of the principles we've included in this book, whether they're aware of it or not.

So what are those secrets so that you too can have a super memory?

GET PERSONALLY INVOLVED.

Whether you're learning a new language, a scientific concept, or a person's name, get involved. Immerse yourself in the language by visiting those museums or watching those cable channels. If possible, visit that foreign country. Buy books in that language, even if you struggle to read them.

When meeting new people, become immediately interested in them. Repeat their first name as you ask a question about their work, their hobbies, or something else. Really listen to what they're saying. As we said, your friends' names are easier to remember because you use them more often and because you're more involved in their lives. Take this same attitude toward whatever it is that you're trying to remember – make it important to you.

GET CREATIVE AND VIVID.

You're going to remember things that are odd or unusual, or in some way out of the ordinary. So when using the link method or the journey method or any other form of visualization, be creative and even a little crazy. If you keep yourself to the literal and everyday, you're not going to remember your own visual clue.

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This is true also when using the story method. It doesn't need to be – and shouldn't be – something that really would happen to you or that you really would see. Make up things that are wild and crazy and imaginative, and then you'll remember them more easily.

EXERCISE YOUR MIND.

When you allow yourself to become mentally lazy by simply plopping down in front of the television every evening or by refusing to really think about current events or get interested in ideas and other people, every aspect of your mental ability is going to get out of shape.

Make it a point to work at staying mentally sharp by not allowing this to happen to you. Turn off the television and read a book, or the newspaper. Take a class that challenges you. Do puzzles. Volunteer.

All of these things will force you to keep your mind sharp, so it will be better equipped to work those memory methods when the time comes.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

None of these methods will come easily to you, at least not at first. This is especially true if you're not a creative person by nature.

This is why it's important to practice your methods before you're actually put on the spot for something that you should have remembered. When studying for an exam, have a study partner quiz you to see if your methods are working. Practice directions or numbers with the journey method. Make up something to remember and ask your spouse or a friend to see how you did.

Once you start doing this, you might find that it's actually fun and enjoyable as you get more creative and more competent in using these methods.

Which brings us to our last secret:

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IT'S FUN!

Really, how often during your day do you get to make up a crazy story about a woman in a wedding dress at a bus stop? Chances are, not very often.

Making your memory methods fun and enjoyable is the real secret to creating lasting memories. That person who always remembers people's names probably finds something interesting to note about each person, and so really enjoys meeting new people. Or that person who remembers all those laws of physics has made science interesting and fun to him or her, and so enjoys learning and applying what he or she has learned.

Do the same for yourself. Find something interesting in whatever it is you're learning, whether it's the name of someone you're just meeting or that foreign language you need to learn.

Once memorization becomes fun to you, then you'll really look forward to the next technique, the next method, and you'll no longer view it as a chore to accomplish.

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THE THREE LAWS OF MEMORY

Most instructors now agree that there are three laws of memory, and you can use this simple word to remember them: CAR.

CONCENTRATION.

Why is concentration so important to memory? As we said, your mind needs time to move information from short-term to long-term memory. If you do not concentrate on information for a long enough time, it simply will not make that move.

Being distracted during a lecture or class, or when you're meeting new people, or even when trying to use one of the memory techniques we've outlined here will only distract you and cause you to lose sight of the information. Make sure you have a clear mind in order to learn.

It might also help to close your eyes when repeating information or creating links and visualization. This helps to block out other distractions. And be sure to turn off the television and radio as well, and refrain from snacking. Anything and everything that distracts you is going to take away from your ability to concentrate.

ASSOCIATION.

Pathways that have already been built for your memories are only going to get stronger as you try to remember additional information.

So, associate information with something you've already learned. This may be as simply as associating a person you're just meeting with someone famous or with a relative who has the same name.

You can even associate numbers that are difficult to remember with other information as well. If your hotel room is 42, and your brother is

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aged 42, then you have your association. If your sales for last year were 14 million and your oldest child is 14, you have an association.

REPETITION.

Your memory is like a muscle and the more you exercise a muscle, the stronger it is. When you repeat information over and over again, you're flexing that memory muscle.

By over-learning information, which is what you do when you repeat it constantly, you're imprinting that information on your brain.

By applying these three laws of memory, and by using the techniques and tips we've outlined for you throughout this book, you'll be able to toss out that pen and paper and remember everything from the smallest grocery list to the longest number, and do so with ease.